

this is emigre magazine

EMIGRE

do

number 15, price \$7.95

you

[special type issue]

read



max kisman

me

jeffery keedy

karrie jacobs

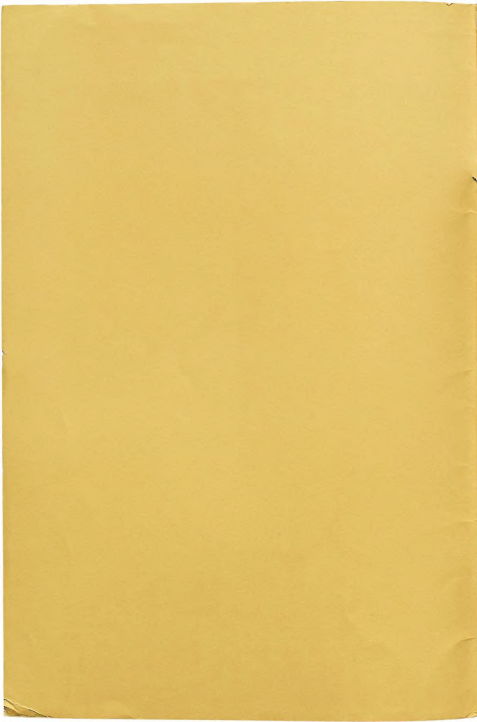
?

zuzana licko

ellen lupton & j. abbott miller

peter mertens

barry deck



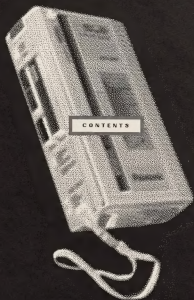
EMIGRÉ 15

Some of the typefaces used in this issue are from monospace and sans serif alphabets based on the ones we used in parts of the readers used in the above issue. For instance, we have an early version of **EMIGRÉ** a typeface designed by John's family, and we use many of the characters from there, particularly in the captions. We also think this **EMIGRÉ** is an interesting typeface and find ourselves using it in an unobtrusive way.

Other designs in our monospace families, used in showing captions in an unobtrusive way, are not able to discuss part of this process.

Other typefaces used in this issue that are still in the drawing stage are John's family's **EMIGRÉ** typeface and John's family's **EMIGRÉ** typeface.

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FEATURING: PETER NERTENS IN AMSTERDAM (PAGE 4), MAX KISHAN IN AMSTERDAM (PAGE
5), ZUZANA LICKO IN BERKELEY (PAGE 8), JOHN DOWNER IN SAN FRANCISCO (PAGE 9),
JEFFERY KEEDY IN LOS ANGELES (PAGE 14), KARRIE JACORS IN NEW YORK (PAGE 18),
BARRY DECK IN LOS ANGELES (PAGE 20), ELLEN LUPTON & J. ABBOTT MILLER IN NEW YORK
(PAGE 1), JOHNNY D. IN CHICAGO (PAGE 33).

**this issue is about
type. it is about our
interest in the design
of new typefaces,
and our concern for
their legibility and
why we need new
typefaces in the first
place. (all texts in
this issue were
meant to be both
seen and read!)** Emigre

Legibility: Letters are legible. If some things are not legible, then they are not letters. Illegible letters do not exist. Illegibility does not exist.

By Peter Mertens

Other methods, including other letter sign systems, exist beside our alphabet for changing sound into signs to render spoken language into symbols capable

of being read. It is also possible to create new systems, such as a system of random signs resembling written language in an associative way, which can be used to make stories. It is

equally possible to use signs as words or as entire stories. Every structure is language, everything is legible.

Legibility is an undefined notion, yet it is utilized. Researchers have tested the possibilities of creating optimal legibility in texts. They determined how wide a text column

should be, how high the ascenders are, what the optimal line spacing is, which typeface presents the most recognizable word shape. They have also found that text in capitals creates indistinguishable word shapes and that serifs create a more easily recognizable letter shape. This information is used

in combination with physiological and ergonomic data about the strength of the eye muscles: How often can they go up and down, how long are your arms? The results of all these findings add up to a text set in a serif typeface of 10/13 point with a column width of 57 mm and a 1.5 cm paragraph indent. Sentences cannot be longer than twelve words and there cannot be more than 3 ten letter words in one sentence, etc. This way, it should be possible to create the perfect text in terms of shape, contrast and legibility. The norm can be set. We're done. Of course, nuances are possible and sometimes necessary. Newspapers require a different approach from scientific journals, as do fairytale books. However, the absolute norm can be set.

A system could be designed that would allow the right solution to be found by means of multiple choice questions. Within artificial intelligence such systems exist and are referred to as "expert systems." To make a long story short, the designing of text has been resolved, we don't have to do anything anymore. Every text can be made optimally legible. That is, as long as every publication can be poured into a mould, a universal shape, a uni-

form. And why not? Why would people -- especially those who have taken it upon themselves to transform language into form, to function as intermediators in communication processes whose goal is to make messages optimally recognizable and legible -- not like uniforms? Because typographic designers love to appropriate the Roman alphabet by continually introducing new letter shapes and by making infinite adjustments to the standard. They do this in order to create a specific character and to keep typefaces alive. Since they work within a very restricted area, they sometimes cross the boundaries of what is considered legible. And because of what...? (Om der wille van der wat?).

Peter Mertens and Max Kizman (the one from page 1, are members of "The Subscribers of Amsterdam," a group of designers/artists from Amsterdam, Holland. At a collective show entitled: TYPOTYPEGRAPHY (TYPOTYPEGRAPHY: Paper). The text on this page was reproduced from "Mile TYP," a copy, which was edited and designed by Peter Mertens.





By JONATHAN JACOBSON, TYP & LARRY LEE

The typography that you are now reading was designed by **Mat + Kisman**, a graphic designer from Amsterdam. Emigre was introduced to Kisman's work when he and fellow members of the collective **With Ambassadors of Aesthetics** sent us their magazine **TYP/Typosraphic Paper** [**TYP/Typosraphic Paper**]. This irregularly published journal on typography, design and literature, which claims to be the only one of its kind in Holland, was instrumental in confirming our beliefs that there exist alternative opinions about type and that our own ideas concerning this topic were not entirely alien. The members of the collective take turns in editing and producing each issue, repeatedly succeeded in presenting fresh ideas and biting criticisms in an ever-unpredictable and highly original format.

Mat + Kisman, as one of the founding members of this group, first gained notoriety as the director for **Vinyl**, an independent magazine for alternative music. Punk and New Wave were still in their heyday and the creators of **Vinyl** felt the excitement should be matched in the design of the magazine. Headline typography were manually produced, editing faces were modified by optical slanting and scaling, and there was abundant experimenting with photocopying.

Soon after Kisman left **Vinyl**, in 1987, he designed and was art director for **Landscape Technology**, a magazine devoted to writing, travel, and photography. For this publication, which was entirely produced on the Macintosh, Kisman designed all of his own type, creating his own "type" in an early form of the computer-driven type design. Kisman was already a designer, so he already designed a group of type for the **Font** series on his design. He created his own type with the Macintosh font system. Much of his early work, including the **Font** series, is designed during this time. Designing the **Font** series of typefaces (the **Font** series is released and sold as a series with the computer. "Font" series designed typefaces. Some are "type" and some are a specific design. The **Font** series is a series of typefaces).



THE FUTURE OF TYPE: A TYPEFACE BY JONATHAN JACOBSON.

tYPEFACES. Sometimes I design a typeface for one purpose. Like a brand T99ent0n-
 En, for instance, where design2ed SPecificALLy For PoSters. The chArActerS in mY dESignS
 aren't alW4yS meant to be rEadAbLE in the trAditionAl SEnSE. Sometimes theY ArE Ab-
 StrAct GrAPhic SyMbOLs, uSed For idEntitY PurPoSES onLy. But theY wILL ALw4yS rEmain
 cOmMunicAtion ElEmEntS. The cOnCEpt Of cOmMunicAtion iS bASed on d9rReMent, it iS
 a cOdE thAt wE hAvE LEArned to dECiphEr. WhEn You Et+clUdE 'Function-
 AL' cOmMunicAtion, bY dEStricting GrAPhic SyMbOLs You cAn crEAtE oth-
 Er FormS Of cOmMunicAtion, bASed on viSuAL imPrESSionS, rHythm And
 EtPrESSion. And thAt'S whAt idEntitY iS About. H
 HowEvEr, AS Et+cted AS hE iS About the M4cintOSH, hE hAS ALw4yS bEEn
 SyNtEticAl, too, nOtinG thAt WThErE wAS SuCh An Et+PLoSion Of PLurAl-
 zAtion in HoLLAnd, Of EvErYbodY doinG hiS Or hEr oWn thInG, thAt in the
 End onE couLdn't SEe the ForESt For the trEEs anYmorE. I hAvE rECentLY
 nOticed the rEtUrN Of cLASSicisM And the intErNAtionAl StYL. EvErY-

typewriter. Sometimes I design a typeface for one purpose, and then I
 produce for instance, some designed specifically for posters. The characters
 in my design aren't always meant to be readable in the traditional sense.
 Sometimes they are abstract graphic symbols, used for identity purposes
 only, but they will always contain communicative elements. The capacity of
 communication is based on appearance, it is a code that we have learned
 to decipher. When you restrict 'functional' communication by designing
 graphic symbols, you get it into other forms of communication, like visual
 impression, rhythm and expression. And that's also identity is about.
 However, as critical as he is about the Macintosh, he has always been
 synthetic, too, noting that whether there was such an explosion of plural-
 ization in Holland, of everybody doing his or her own thing, that in the
 end one couldn't see the forest for the trees anymore. I have recently
 noticed the return of classicism and the international style. Every-

TEMPERATURE

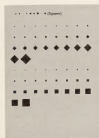
d b [d p f q h
 i j k l m n o p q r
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 s t u v w x y z
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0
 ! @ () - = : ; , . ? " ' ,
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Fig. 1. The Macintosh. Expressions, typewriter design.

whERe I looK nOwAdD4yS, I SEe thIS 'YuPPIE-chic-cEntEr-At-iS dE-
 Sign.' It'S An inEvitAbLE rEAction to ALL the dNArchisTic M4cintOSH
 StUFF. W PErSonALLY, hE'S FEELd An incREASinG nEEd to moVe AW4Y
 From the tEchnoLoGY to cOnCEntRAtE on hAnd-drawn iLLuStrA-
 tionS And mAnuALLy ProDuceD dESign. WhEn wE FirSt intErVieWEd
 him in hiS bASEmEnt StUdio in AmStErDAm in AuGUSt '87, And ASKEd
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 AvAILAbLE to othEr GrAPhic dESignERs, hE rEPLEd, W! hAvE mY
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 For YuEY SPecific rEASonS. I hAvEn't rEALLy uSed theM Much For AnY othEr PurPoSE thAn
 whAt theY wERE intEndEd For. ThESE FACES wERE So PArticuLAr in tERMS Of theiR chAr-
 ActEr And theRE wAS So Much Put intO theM thAt theY bECAmE too SPecific to uSE AnY-
 whERe ElSE. ALSo, W hE cOntinUed, WEvEn thOugh You cAn nOw dESiLY mAnuFActurE tYPE,
 theRE'S morE to runninG a tYPE cOmPAnY thAn JuSt cOPyInG FontS Onto diSkS And I Am
 JuSt nOt intErEstEd in inVOLuinG mYSELf With thAt. H

HiS tYPEFACES, howEvEr, mighT YEt bECOME AvAILAbLE to uS SinCE the FontShOp [the
 BErLin|TorEnto|London|N4w YOrK-bASEd tYPE Foundry And diStribution cOmPAnY] iS

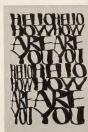


MAX KLEMAN.
Grid. Square, rectangle design.
Rebel. Not in its square.

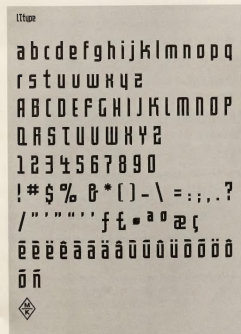
currently considering releasing some of them in the near future. Max Kisman's response to this sudden interest in his fonts has renewed his excitement in the design of type. It is very flattering that they are interested and it gives me a feeling that my fonts will now be preserved in a sense. I am very curious to see how other designers will use my fonts. However, to me they will always be representative of those early, pioneering years of the Macintosh.

request is normally something along the lines of "I am looking for a font that is similar to the one I am looking for." The designer's response is to the sudden interest in his fonts has renewed his excitement in the design of type. It is very flattering that they are interested and it gives me a feeling that my fonts will now be preserved in a sense. I am very curious to see how other designers will use my fonts. However, to me they will always be representative of those early, pioneering years of the Macintosh.

the Macintosh.



Max Kisman.
Custom script design done in FontLab.



MAX KLEMAN. LType, regular design.

Typeface designs: Zuzana Licko. The typeface that you are now reading is called Triplex Bold and was designed by

Zuzana Licko (pronounce Litcho). Although initially designed as a rational/geometric font, it developed into one of Licko's most intuitive typefaces.

It's first extensive use was in *Emigre* magazine #14, a special issue devoted to Swiss designers. Triplex was intended as a friendly substitute for Helvetica. The name Triplex refers to the three versions that make up the entire family; Triplex, Triplex Serif and Triplex Italic. Each version of the typeface comes in light, bold and extra bold.

The italic was designed and drawn by type designer and sign painter John Downer, and was designed to work with both the serif and sans serif versions.

The following interview with Zuzana Licko was conducted at the *Emigre* office in California on February 12, 1990. *Emigre:* Unlike most commonly produced typefaces, your type library seems very specific to the technology you have at hand. **Zuzana:** Yes, especially my bitmap type designs, created for the

coarse resolutions of the computer screen and dot matrix printer. Part of this is because the early computers were so limited in what they could do that you really had to design something special.

Even if it was difficult to adapt calligraphy to

lead and later lead to photo technology, it could be done, but it was physically impossible to adapt 8 point Goudy Old Style to 72 dots to the inch. In the end you couldn't tell Goudy Old Style apart from Times Roman or any other serif text face. However, computer technology has reached a point where any typeface can be device-independent. This is because of the device, not because of the design of the typeface. The

computer, even the Macintosh, which is one of the lowest end and most popular computers, is at a point where it can faithfully reproduce just about anything. You no longer have to concern yourself with the technology of how a typeface is going to reproduce. You can design whatever forms you like without much limitation

from the medium. *Emigre:* So you can now produce completely characterless typefaces, right? **Zuzana:** Right. And if we no longer have to be concerned with the technology, then why don't we just reuse existing type designs? We can use those just as well as design something else that doesn't have to be concerned with technology. *Emigre:* Are you saying that only typefaces that come naturally out of a certain technology have validity? **Zuzana:** No, although personally I think that those typefaces often do look most powerful, because they were created for a very specific purpose and show real intent. I am bent on making the medium work to the

advantage of the design because I find pleasure in that; no other reason. I don't necessarily think that a device-independent typeface, like Stone for instance, is invalid. Although I don't think that a typeface like that accomplishes anything new, I could be wrong. It's all a matter of opinion. It's just that I don't find pleasure in what those type designers are involved in. I'm very much interested in the device. That's where I get my creative energy from. And I guess other people don't. A designer like Gerard Unger, for example, loves curves. To him it doesn't matter whether the curves are drawn by pencil or by the computer as long as they are the curves

that he's looking for. He has a vision. I don't have that. *Emigre:* But you do have a certain aim when you design type, don't you? **Zuzana:** Yes. My aim is to explore two things. First of all, I like to experiment with what the computer can do with things that were not possible with other technologies. I like to design letterforms that work well with the computer, both for pragmatic reasons and stylistic reasons. Because sometimes, not always, but sometimes, you do need something that works well on the screen, like *Exposure* right. If you do a lot of editing on the screen or you use the Imagewriter printer, you do, for pragmatic reasons, need a coarse resolution typeface. But then, some of my other typefaces look geometric or coarse for stylistic reasons. For instance, *Matrix* could just as well have had more traditional looking serifs, but for stylistic reasons, for making it look new, I use a shape that the computer is good at generating. My other aim when designing typefaces is to see how much the basic letter shapes can be changed and still be functional, like the lower case g in *Matrix*

Q

h e m m
n g t r l q
g y r y
z A E
o o o o

g t r l q

These drawings were done in New City about five years ago. The Italic was conceived as a companion for another typeface being drawn at the same time called Arakent, which (like Trichter) could be described as a "humanist sans-serif" having simplified character shapes constructed mostly of geometric parts. One might use this Italic as an exercise in combining elements that combine typographic forms in a way that emphasizes the presence of unusual splices and joins.

At one stage, a certain customer was interested in Arakent but wanted a different Italic drawn for it, so the plan for the Italic took another direction and the idea for this one was dropped. Later, I began to see the drawings shown here, along with a poster proof made from them, and subsequently decided to commission the abandoned Italic as a digital typeface to three weights to go with David Lubin's new Trichter typeface family. The uppercase and lowercase have been altered to match those of Trichter and the new capitals embody more of the features that distinguish the lower case, but otherwise the digital version closely follows the original drawings. Arakent, as it happened, just did begin and was not completed.

John Dummer, San Francisco, May 1990

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amen

amen u

A

or some of the VDTREX characters. I am always very intrigued by experimental alphabets that either have no capitals or mix upper and lower characteristics, like Bradbury Thompson's Alphabet 26, or his typeface that has only lower case and uses boldface characters for caps. This is actually what Matthew Carter at Bitstream suggested I do with VDTREX, since there is no upper or lower case in VDTREX. I like that, although it is not always applicable. *Emigre*: How did the computer give you creative inspiration specifically for typefaces, as opposed to graphic design? Zuzana: I enjoy things that are like puzzles;

anything that is tremendously restrictive, where there are very few choices but you have to make it work. If I get too many choices I become overwhelmed. I just don't have the time and patience to look at every possible scenario. This is the problem I have with graphic design. I never got the feeling that I found the final solution to a problem. Although today I can more easily design a typeface like Triplex, which is a bit more traditional and less modular, than I could have five years ago, I still get most of my creative energy out of solving these puzzles. When nobody is able to make something work, I get inspired to find out what I might do with it. Ever since I was first introduced to graphic design, I heard everybody say how bad digital type looked and how it was impossible to make it look any better. This really intrigued me.

Whenever anybody makes a statement like that, I have difficulty agreeing. I was reading books on the history of graphic design and in the final chapter they would always mention something about digital type and show the same typefaces like OCR A or B. Some of them were actually interesting but never really good, especially for setting text. Then I read Chuck Bigelow's writings on the subject of digital type. I was fascinated and agreed with a lot of the things he was saying, but when I looked at the visual results I was a bit disappointed with how traditional his type still looked.

So I saw that there was something unexplored and interesting there and I wanted to try my own hand at it. That's when I got involved with designing my first low resolution type in a computer class that I took. But every time I asked for advice, people kept telling me it was really a lost cause, that it couldn't be done. So I thought that anything I would do would be better than what was out there. *Emigre*: When you look back at your early low resolution type, do you feel you succeeded? Zuzana: For myself, yes.

But then later I discovered quite a bit of material that I should have seen before I started. Issue number 6 of *Baseline* magazine, which was edited by Erik Spiekermann, was very good and informative. But then again, if I had read it beforehand, I might never have tried to explore the really basic ideas that I had.

Emigre: You mentioned that after five years of working on simple bitmap type designs you have acquired some confidence doing more humanist designs such as Triplex. Have you ever considered designing type entirely by hand, more calligraphic type?

Zuzana: I've never been very attracted to calligraphy. With calligraphy there was such a set way of doing things that unless you could technically outdo the next guy it became just a matter of production. How many hours could you spend doing this? That to me was more therapeutic than creative.

I'm very concerned with maximizing our resources and not fighting with the medium. We do it in our design work as well. For example, we like to overprint offset colors, instead of knocking them out, in order not to kill ourselves in the stripping process. And that's not just a matter of money, it's also that things look better that way and are easier to produce. Why do it the difficult way, or why do it backwards? Simply because that's the way you happen to think and you haven't taught yourself to see things in a more direct way? When designers do things that don't come out of the medium, such as reproducing Goudy Old Style or Optima

CITIZEN

DESIGNED BY EUGENE LITMAN
AVAILABLE AUGUST 1988

ggg

CITIZEN 13

THE DESIGN OF CITIZEN (FIGURE 13) IS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE "SMART" PRINTING METHOD PROVIDED BY THE APPLE LASERWRITER. THIS FEATURE OFFERS A SHORTCUT TO INCREASING THE RESOLUTION OF BITMAP IMAGES FROM SCREEN TO PRINTER. THE POINT BITMAPS ARE PROCESSED INTO 64K DPI BITMAPS, THEREBY PREPARING THE ILLUSTRATION OF HIGH RESOLUTION PRINTING. THE IMAGES OF CITIZEN WERE GENERATED BY SMOOTHING A LOW-RES BITMAP, ENLARGING IT APPROPRIATELY FROM 100%, AND THEN SMOOTHING IT AGAIN (FIGURE 11). THE NUMBER "EIGHTY" (FIGURE 12) APPEARED AS STRAIGHT LINES OF VARYING LENGTH AND ANGLE, WHILE WORDS WERE THEN CONVERTED INTO OUTLINE FORM.

Av
Citizen
bold or..

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPpQqRrSsTtUuVvWwXxYyZz
1234567890

CITIZEN 13

.Light



a bitmap blackletter typeface **cdesfthz** was imported into fontographer 3.0

and placed in the background plane. the background was then "autotraced"



and several surprising shapes were generated.

cdesfthz

the essence of these forms is used as the basis for the design of

totally gothic

a new typeface designed by zuzana licko for emigre graphics.

available august 1990

"typefaces are not intrinsically legible. rather, it is the reader's familiarity with faces that accounts for their legibility. studies have shown that readers read best what they read most. legibility is also a dynamic process, as readers' habits are everchanging. it seems curious that blackletter typestyles, which we find illegible today, were actually preferred over more humanistic designs during the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. similarly, typestyles that we perceive as illegible today may well become tomorrow's classic choices."

with postscript, or reversing six point red type out of a composite 20% blue and 60% yellow screen, when people do that, it's usually not because it's absolutely the best way to communicate the message. I think it is because of their disinterest in understanding the possibilities of the tools, or how these tools can possibly be used better. It's just that they don't think. They can only work within the narrow range of what they're used to. It's all preconceived. Look at typeface designers. They think that typefaces need to look a certain way because they are calligraphers, and that's the way type has always been for them. They're content to continue designing the same type styles regardless of the medium they're using. And that's plain stupid. Why do something that goes against the grain of the medium that you're using? That's why I still like to design low resolution typefaces. It has something to do with elegance. When something emerges naturally, it sits right. You don't feel like you're beating against the current. And that's a feeling that I enjoy. *Emigre:*

Which of your typefaces do you like best in this respect? **Zuzana:** Low resolution typefaces like *Imperator Eight* or *OAKLAND SIX*; they really work well at every level on the computer. You can use them in high resolution programs and you can use them in MacPaint and they feel just as comfortable. *Emigre:* *Sure, they feel comfortable to you and me and in relationship to the medium, but how are people supposed to understand this, and link that to print? It still looks very uncomfortable to people who eventually just want to read it.* **Zuzana:** But why is that? It's because they're not used to seeing low resolution type, I think. *Emigre:* *Right! Not everybody is used to staring at a low resolution Macintosh screen all day like you. And your type is eventually used in print, people very seldom read it off the screen.* **Zuzana:** I know! But why did letter press type start to look a certain way, and why was that eventually accepted? Not because people were reading the type off the bed of the letterpress. They were still reading it off the printed page. That didn't have anything more to do with casting lead than it does with computer chips today, but that's where it comes from, and that's what we've gotten used to. It's the same with Blackletter, which was at one point more legible to people than humanist typefaces. That's a shocker. I agree with the fact that if you are setting books and other things that just need to be read and understood easily, you need to use something other than *OAKLAND SIX*. In those cases you need to use something that is not necessarily intrinsically more legible, but that people are used to seeing. This is what makes certain typestyles more legible or comfortable. You read best what you read most. However, those preferences for typefaces such as Times Roman exist by habit, because those typefaces have been around longest. When those typefaces first came out, they were not what people were used to, either. But because these faces were frequently used, they have become extremely legible. Maybe some of my typefaces will eventually reach this point of acceptance, and therefore become more legible two hundred years from now, who knows?

BEGINNING: I don't think I ever saw a typeface that I liked so completely that I wished I had designed it myself, until about half a year ago, when Jeffery Keedy showed some posters on which he had used one of his "own" typefaces. "It's called *Bondage*," he said, "and it's not quite done." Finished or not, I thought it was an awkward but intriguing typeface and surprisingly readable. When I asked him if he had plans to release it, he replied: "I never thought of that as a possibility. Who would want to use something this strange anyway?" I don't consider this typeface "strange," at least not any stranger than some of his most recent fonts, and obviously, I found use for it too. The text that you are now reading was set in *Bondage*. It was recently renamed to *KEEDY* and it is still not quite finished. While finetuning *KEEDY*, Jeffery has simultaneously worked on the design of some half a dozen original typefaces. Although still not convinced of their marketability, he nevertheless has decided to manufacture and make his fonts available through his new company called Cipher. *KEEDY* will be released in late fall, both by Cipher and by Emigre Graphics. This interview with Jeffery took place somewhere on the second floor above one of the many restaurants in the Farmer's Market in Los Angeles on April 1, 1990.



Jeffery Keedy and Edward Fella in Los Angeles, 1990

Emigre: Looking at your typefaces, it seems as if you haven't finished the spacing on some of them. Are they done? **Mr. Keedy:** Actually, I've spaced *KEEDY* and *Manuscript* irregularly on purpose, and I've used

them that way for a while. Rather than immediately jump in and space

them regularly, I wanted to try and learn something from the spacing. **Em-**

igre: So what did you learn? That words are hard to recognize perhaps? **Mr.**

Keedy: No, and I don't think they're hard to read either. Those are all conventions. I still find them easy to read. They're intrusive because you notice them, but I don't think that's the same as being hard to read. Being intrusive or noticeable is something additional. One doesn't necessarily cancel out the other.

Emigre: What do you gain by altering the convention? **Mr. Keedy:** The whole idea of irregular spacing works well with the computer. If you don't pay attention to the placement of the characters when you draw them, you get irregular or bad spacing. It's a byproduct of the machine. It takes a lot of time if you want the spacing to be right. You have to go in and create kerning pairs and all that. That's a very conscious act. If you ignore that, you get very bizarre spacing. **Emigre:** But that is not something that comes out of the machine or the technology, it's you not willing to spend the time to get it right. **Mr. Keedy:** It comes out of a certain way of working, and it involves accepting chance. There are many changes or innovations that take place in graphic design. People have tried wide letter spacing and tight letter spacing, but the idea of irregular letter spacing has never been intentionally explored (except for the work of my colleague Edward Fella) because

everything has to be regular. There's always this obsession with regularity and clarity. **Emigre:** How do I know you're not doing this just for the sake

Manuscript

of being different? Mr. Keedy: The need to do things irregularly comes out of a need to make things more personal and idiosyncratic. Also, people think of the computer as being as impersonal, cold and calculating machine, but ironically, it allows for a great deal of irregularity and personal expression. I think we're going to see the most idiosyncratic, personal and odd sort of things happening in typeface design ever since hand lettering and calligraphy. Those disciplines allowed for a great deal of personal expression, too. Emigre: We've already made it to the point that you are trying to get to. For the past thirty or forty years, designers have tried to clean things up and sort things out. They have designed typefaces like Helvetica and Times Roman that are easy to read, and there are typesetting equipment and typesetters who know how to set type and letter space in order to make all information a little more legible and less personal. There was, at one point, a concern that people weren't able to read things any more, that there was too much personal expression resulting in chaos. Mr. Keedy: Really? Well, I don't agree. That is such a Modernist notion. The Modernists have a kind of Utopian vision of how the world should be. I have no vision of how

to make the world correct, I have no vision of how the world should be. **My work is a reaction to the things that are happening around me in my world. And I am more interested in including than excluding.** Emigre: By putting so

much of your personal experiences into your designs, don't you think there is a chance you might overpower the client's message? Mr. Keedy: I work for a variety of clients. I sometimes do work that isn't highly erratic or personal. I think it's a matter of knowing when to do what. It's a matter of many things being possible and not a matter of this or that. There obviously is a very big difference between doing the signage for the Emergency Room in a hospital or doing an announcement for a party, and I feel confident that most designers understand that difference and work accordingly. You don't really need a lot of rules to protect the general public. No one has ever been killed by graphic design. It's not like architecture. I've done some really strange things and I don't think anyone has even gotten seriously wounded by my work. Emigre: You have always been quite hesitant about making your typefaces available to the public. Were you worried that other designers might use your type inappropriately? Mr. Keedy: My only reservations about selling my

faces and having them out there is that they need to be exactly right when I sell them. Because once they're out there, you're not going to call everyone back and say wait a minute, I need to fix something. Emigre: Many traditional typefaces have been redesigned and changed and evolve continually. There are numerous versions of Helvetica out on the market. Mr. Keedy: If I think of myself as a consumer, I would have a problem with any product that has that kind of range. It's like buying a Coke and on every other bottle, they change the syrup ratio. You should know what you're getting. Emigre: What do you think of the risk that, if other designers use your typefaces in their designs, they will end up looking like your work?

Mr. Keedy: I am not worried about that. **I don't feel that I have a hold on authenticity and that these are all just my ideas.** If someone wanted to copy anything I did, I'd say give me a call and I'll tell

you exactly how I did it. If they really want to copy me, they might as well copy me really well. I have certain ideas about how my typefaces work, but I would love to see what other people do with them. It would not bother me; I'd be so excited that anyone would even use them in the first place. I also have no fear of people misusing or abusing them. Too often I see typeface designers or type foundries set out rules for the use of their fonts: "This is correct use, this is not correct," which I think is a bit naive. Emigre: Why did you

start designing your own typefaces in the first place? Mr. Keedy: Actually, I've always wanted to design typefaces, because **as a designer I realized there is no escaping being post-modern, since the typefaces available are very old or are based on very old models. Even when you try to do something contemporary, you rely on these old typefaces and conventions.** As a designer, you're quite often

using a photographer's photographs, the typehouse's typefaces and the printer's printing. You're using all this other material, and your energy and your aesthetic are getting dissipated. Not that I mind the collaborative part, I like working with other people and bringing other things into work. It just always seemed interesting to me to do as much as I could myself. Look at design history, look at people like Theo van Doesburg, for instance; he had certain ideologies and wanted his own typeface, so he designed one. I thought that was great! Actually that's why one of the first typefaces I designed I called NeoTheo. It was based on his design. The other reason I called it NeoTheo was because in dealing with students, I found that whenever they see these orthogonal letterforms, they tell me that Neville Brody invented all that. So I wanted to credit Theo van Doesburg and

acknowledge that these are his ideas, which have been brought up and considered again. Emigre: Are you going to market your typefaces to a particular audience? Mr. Keedy: I'll probably do a mailing and then will primarily rely on word of mouth. The kind of thing I'm doing is so idiosyncratic, I really think only a very small group will be interested. It will be pointless for me to blanket America with this because America is not really that interested in what I am doing. Emigre: You'd be surprised. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to what the audience likes. One of Adobe's top selling typeface packages contains

Aachen, Revue and University Roman. To me, those are really weird and ugly typefaces. Mr.

Keedy: I feel that I should do whatever it is that I'm interested in and be honest to my passions. I can't see myself trying to think about what other people would want and what the market will bear. I've never liked that way of thinking, anyway. I've never agreed with marketing ideas and the ethics of marketing. Emigre: What do your clients think about your typefaces?

You have used most of them on the LACE flyers. Do they recognize your typefaces as different?

Mr. Keedy: The people at LACE are all Mac-literate and they realize they are not the usual Macintosh fonts. When I first started using my own type, I used the handwriting type and they said:

"God, did you write all this by hand?" They thought I was trying to make some money by not

typesetting. In general they tend to like my typefaces. The funny thing about many clients when

it comes to typefaces is that they're not very knowledgeable. With Manuscript, for instance, which I think is quite peculiar, probably 90% of the clients wouldn't really know the difference between that and, let's say, Futura. Most clients don't see type the way designers do. There are very few that have a really keen eye for it. Also, the type of changes that I'm introducing to fonts aren't going to be that jarring, except when it comes to the handwriting fonts or NeoNeo, but those are mostly used in a display context. Emigre: To me, most of your typefaces are quite jarring. Are you making typefaces ugly on purpose? Mr. Keedy: I don't think they're ugly at all. "Ugly" is such a harsh word. Emigre: Okay, how about "not pretty"? Mr.

Keedy: I'll say that much, they're not pretty. **Emigre: Why don't you want to make pretty typefaces? Mr. Keedy: Well, it's been done, let's face it.** Again, what I'm trying to accomplish with my typefaces and typography is to introduce and express new tones or voices. There have

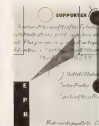
really been only a few voices. A few pretty and maybe a few strong voices. I'm bringing up a whole lot of other voices. A good number of them wouldn't be seen as pretty, but on the other hand, when Baskerville introduced his typeface, everyone was saying: "Oh god, what an ugly typeface!" Actually, it's possible that in thirty or forty years people might think of my typefaces as elegant. You have to look at them in the context of time. Eventually they might even be stodgy, old typefaces. Emigre: Baskerville eventually became a good typeface because it was used a lot. I don't think it is intrinsically a legible typeface. People just became familiar with it by default. When you promote the idea that designers should get more involved in designing their own typefaces and personalizing them, are you not worried that if everyone does their own type, the audience will never really get used to any of them, and subsequently will have a harder time reading? Mr. Keedy:

There will never be a font that is as pervasive as Helvetica again, because there are going to be just too many typefaces out there, too many designers wanting to do things that are specific. And what that means is that communication will get a little closer to ideas. Ideas are very specific. Places are specific. Why should every airport sign system on the planet be designed with Helvetica? Emigre: Because, especially with sign systems, people have to be able

to read information in a split second and Helvetica has been forced down everybody's throat, and has therefore become a very recognizable and easy-to-read typeface. Don't you feel that if every designer designs his or her own typefaces, and you have all these voices speaking, that the audience is going to have a hard time constantly adjusting to all these variations on the same theme? Don't you think you make things more complex by adding yet another typeface, yet another variation? Mr. Keedy:

Maybe it's making things more complex, but it is also making things more specific, and in that sense I can say it is making things clearer. It is

the Modernist argument that designers need to promote clarity, serving human advancement. To them, clarification is always moving forward and improving. I don't necessarily agree with that, either. I think there are a lot of voices that have not been heard typographically. Whenever I start a new job and try to pick a



Detail from a flyer for LACE

typeface, none of the available typefaces can give me the voice that I need. They just don't relate to my experiences in my life. They're about somebody else's experiences, which don't belong to me. And maybe I have, or want to have, a high opinion of the audience and think they want and deserve a lot. Once upon a time, there weren't hundreds of radio and television stations and thousands of magazines. People haven't exactly gone mad with that. Emigre: But look at how little they read and remember of all the things that they see every day. Mr. Keedy: I don't know that people take in little and read little. There are people who say that the public is no longer literate now. This might be true in the traditional sense, but little kids can read sophisticated visual images because they see as many images in two days as people fifty years ago saw in a month or a year. And they have an ability to see all kinds of subtleties visually. I think literacy is changing. It's not always fair to say that people are illiterate because they no longer can quote from Shakespeare. They might not even know who Shakespeare is anymore, but they know a lot of other things. I wouldn't make the assumption that just because someone might not know this particular thing, or has that particular skill, that they have spent all their time staring into space. They've learned and engaged in other activities and have other skills. Emigre: I understand that as a graphic designer, in order to care for the work you do, you have to be able to enjoy what you do, which sometimes leads to self-indulgence. However, you cannot lose sight of the fact that everything you do is meant for other people to read. Mr. Keedy:

But I see those other people as being much like me. They live in the same world that I do, we share the same context. In a sense, I would say I'm doing what they'd be doing if they were in my shoes. Emigre: How about the scholarships posters, what did the client think about the typefaces you used? Mr. Keedy: There was one problem with legibility. The upper case V isn't very distinct from the upper case U and as a result the word VISUAL was a bit hard to read. That was the only point of contention. Emigre: Did you change the designs of the letters? Mr. Keedy: No I didn't. During the meeting with the client, they brought in the secretary and everybody was able to read it fine. We don't read letterforms, we read words, and in the overall context, you could easily read the word VISUAL. I compromise on ideas a great deal, but when it comes down to aesthetic issues I don't give very much ground, because I feel this is my job, this is what I do best. It would have been fairly simple to redesign the letters, but I had no desire to do that. There was a certain degree of ambiguity at play. This brings me to a point that often drives me crazy.

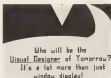
Many people feel it's their role in life to destroy all ambiguity. I think that ambiguity is life itself and it's what makes life interesting. We too often assume that people are so stupid that they can't deal with ambiguity. I think people live for ambiguity and complexity, I know I do.

Emigre: Don't you think that if type became ambiguous, people would start dismissing it, and not read it? Mr. Keedy: Some people would, but that would be their choice. The ambiguity in my work creates a space for the viewer or the reader to become the designer and make the piece on his or her own terms. If, as a designer, you have a very heavy hand, then you're telling people what is good, or aesthetic or interesting. I like to create situations where the viewer can come to it and make something out of it, if someone interprets my work in a way that is totally new to me, I say fine, I like that. That way your work has a life of its own. You create a situation for people to do with it what they will, and you don't create an enclosed or encapsulated moment. Emigre: You seem to

have no problem using what most people consider display type in text. Mr. Keedy: We communicate so much differently now. In type, there are generally display and text faces. But the world is changing. We now work with kinds of communication that are really somewhere in between display and text. Everything doesn't break down so neatly anymore between headlines and body text. Emigre: Aren't designers contributing to presenting information in a more and more abbreviated and purely visual way? Mr. Keedy: Designers are not responsible for any of that, they don't even contribute to that. Designers work with the world, they work with clients.

We don't impose that much. What we impose is within the context of what goes on in the world, and the changes that result are usually small. Design is very affirmative in that way. We're affirming other people's ideas, affirming other people's messages and combining them with our own.

I don't see our role at all as forcing a change on communication. Communication is always in flux. And information has a life of its



Scholarship poster

Emigre: Could you tell me how you got involved in writing critical essays about type and graphic design? **Karrie:** Before I joined *Metropolis*, I worked freelance for various magazines in New York. I wrote a lot about advertising for *AdWeek* and more or less became their design person. They would call me up and say, "Can you write a twelve hundred word essay on the trend in advertising illustration in three days?" **Emigre:** Do you have a specific background that made you particularly eligible for this? **Karrie:** No, not really, but for whatever reason, I have always been fascinated by the design of things. Actually, I couldn't figure out why or how I knew anything about design until recently, when I was looking through some old *Mad* magazines and found an article that I remember reading as a kid. It was a really sarcastic story about packaging. I remember talking about it with my friends in grade school and trying to explain to them that there was a profession that I thought was really interesting. For the longest time I couldn't figure out how I knew, when I was a kid, that there was such a thing as package design, but it must have had something to do with that *Mad* magazine article. Anyway, I started writing about things from a sort of design point of view, maybe also because a lot of my friends, when I lived in Seattle, were graphic designers. **Emigre:** But you don't have any formal design or art school education? **Karrie:** No, I never attended art school. I have no skills or artistic talent in these areas. The magazines I worked for just started assigning me articles on graphic design and package design. I also did some writing for the *Vogue*, for the fashion section. I would do really strange fashion design stories, like one about people who design last food uniforms. After a while I had a collection of design stories, which lead to me being hired at *Metropolis*. Shortly after joining, I gave them a lot of story ideas, things I wanted to write about, which included the Type '89 conference that was coming up in New York. I'd been working for *Metropolis* only for a couple of

months and wasn't really involved in the graphic design world then, and I just thought it'd be interesting to go and talk to type designers. **Emigre:** Really? Didn't a type designers' conference seem a bit dull to you? **Karrie:** It didn't occur to me that it would be dull. I just thought what a weird anonymous thing to do for a living. It's like designing the air people breathe. It's this weird job, but if you think about it, it's the most ubiquitous thing. **Emigre:** The article ("An Essential Guide to Type," *Metropolis*, April 1988) was tremendously in-depth, covering everything from type manufacturing to type use. Did you meet people like Matthew Carter from *Bestroom* or Sumner Stone from *Adobe* at the conference? **Karrie:** I heard Matthew Carter speak, but I never got to talk to him personally at the conference. I talked to some guy from *Linotype* and I made somebody else from *Linotype* explain exactly what they were doing, but in general I just listened to people talk and took notes and figured out what it was exactly that people were mad about. It was amusing to me that there were all these people who were really furious, and all they did was talk about type. I couldn't believe the incredible putnamism and the concerns about "what are they doing to our letterforms?" There were people who got red in the face talking about x-height! **Emigre:** Did any of it make sense to you? **Karrie:** Yes, and it was fascinating. And as I said in the original article, there are parallels between what happens to type when it becomes a product and when, for instance, an entity like ITC, with all their concerns, starts to market and starts to change the shapes of letters, and every other thing that gets mass-marketed, whether it's art or literature or soap or whatever. I was also intrigued by the ephemeral quality of type, and what today's type is compared to what it was when it was something much more tangible, and the fact that we still talk about it using the same language as if it were solid pieces of metal. **Emigre:** You must have felt like an overnight type expert after having done all that research for your article? **Karrie:** I don't know. I read that article not too long ago and I have no idea how I knew some of that stuff because I don't remember it now. I taped people and I started really looking at type, trying to develop a literacy to be able to recognize different typefaces. I was seriously interested in the idea of what makes a typeface a typeface. What are the things that hold it together? **Emigre:** Did you come up with an answer for yourself? **Karrie:** No. **Emigre:** I'm not surprised. Nothing will ever be resolved anyway, because type design and legibility and our reading habits are always evolving. Every time you ask type designers why one typeface reads well and the other doesn't, or why one typeface is better than the other, beyond the economic or uneconomic letter count, they can't give you any hard facts about it. **Karrie:** It's not a science. **Emigre:** Abso-



The type designer should avoid idiosyncracies as far as possible in his typefaces since these are detrimental to the universal use of the type. *Typography*, by Emil Ruder, 1966, p. 8. A designer should cultivate an awareness of the variety of forms available in type, and be alert to recognize when the copy presents an opportunity to use it effectively. He will thus avoid monotony in his typography, and at the same time help the reader to grasp the meaning of the message. *Design with Type*, by Carl Dole, 1967, p. 67. Reprinted by permission of University of Toronto Press. In the strictest sense, legible typography is a means of communicating information objectively. *Typographic Design: Form and Communication*, by Rob Carter, Ben Day, and Philip Meggs, p. 82. Generally speaking, the typefaces in common use are equally legible, so even the inexperienced user runs little risk of selecting a text typeface that is terribly inappropriate. Readers seem to prefer a typeface that is neither light nor bold, but approaches boldness. Readers also prefer a serif to a sans serif typeface, although there is no difference in reading speed between the two. *The Illustrated Handbook of Desktop Publishing and Typesetting*, by Michael L. Kleger. The characters in a particular sans serif face may be perfectly legible in themselves, but no one would think of setting a popular novel in it because its readability is low. *Letters of*

Credit, by Walter Tracy. Copyright 1986 by Walter Tracy. Reprinted by permission of David R. Godine, publisher. The relative legibility between serif and sans serif typefaces is negligible. Reader familiarity and the control of other legibility factors are far more significant than the selection of a serif or sans serif typeface. *Typographic Design: Form and Communication*, by Rob Carter, Ben Day, and Philip Meggs, p. 84. One major difference between fonts are the handles that extend beyond the end of a stroke. These are known as serifs. Serifs tend to link one letter to the next, drawing us forward; the variations in the line keep the eye

alert. Many contemporary fonts such as Helvetica end without serifs, and are known as sans serif fonts. These fonts seem to work best for short, large headings, and for small words and numbers, where serifs might make a blur out of the whole line. *Laserwriter and Laserwriter Plus Manual*, by Apple Computer, 1986, p. 107. The neutral typeface, aloof from all national considerations, has already to some extent become reality. *Typography*, by Emil Ruder, 1981, p. 10. Despite the undeniable appeal of sans serif faces, they are not suitable for extended reading. Their sharp corners, apparent uniform weight, and lack of horizontal emphasis reduces legibility and thus comprehension. "When in Doubt, Set it in Caslon," *ALGA Journal*, vol. 6, by David Lancaster Gowers, 1988, p. 15. The whole area of typeface legibility is murky. I'll continue to use serif faces for large blocks of reading matter. The reason for doing this is because there would be discomfort caused by ... the simple fact that sans serif is not what people expect to see. "Letters to the Editor," (Response to "When in Doubt, Set it in Caslon"), *ALGA Journal*, vol. 3, by David Ford, 1988, p. 14. Typography is no longer concerned with meeting the lofty and difficult demands of art but with satisfying, formally and functionally, the everyday requirements of a craft. *Typography*, by Emil Ruder, 1981, p. 14. Letters are legible. If some things are not legible, then they are not letters. Illegible letters do not exist. Illegibility does not exist. *Typ/Typografisch Papier*, 4E, May 1989. Reprinted by permission of Peter Merrens. Legible: Capable of being deciphered or read. [Latin "legere," to read]. From Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary.

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lately met, but there are enough type designers who want to make you believe it is, who say this is a good typeface and this is a bad typeface. **Karrie:** Well, there is definitely a lot of snobbery about certain typefaces. During the conference, someone would mention Cheltenham and people would giggle. But that's all irrelevant. Sure, there are typefaces that are less legible than others. Some of Milton Glaser's display typefaces weren't too legible, or those designers in the states, who did typefaces you don't want to look at for very long. That's also probably true for some of the things that you guys do. But by and large, it's not what type you use, it's what your intentions are and whether it matters to you that people read or not. And the funniest thing about this whole conference and the excessiveness of it was that it was completely divorced from what type is. Type designers and graphic designers too often talk about type as if it were a formal language, as if

it has nothing to do with real language. They look at type under a microscope and they worry about such things as whether it's pure or not, or whether it's as pure as it would be if it were metal. Those people are, in a way, as disinterested in readability as you would be when you do layering and overlapping of sentences. **Emigre:** I don't think we're disinterested in readability, it's just that as designers we have more concerns than just making text readable. Besides the clients who like to see their ideas implemented, we have deadlines, budget restrictions, but most importantly we're often dependent upon complex equipment that we have to utilize and understand. And whenever the equipment and the technologies change, as is the case now with the introduction of the Macintosh computer, our focus tends to shift towards the technology or the craft. But there is obviously self-indulgence, too. I think our own work, and especially our low resolution typefaces, are a combination of trying to understand this new technology and having great fun doing it. And of course we have received quite a bit of criticism. You have in the past been quite critical of our work, saying that our hyperdigitized fonts are an affront to type. **Karrie:** I don't think I said they were an affront to type, I said they were an affront to language.

And what I meant was that particularly in *Emigre*, you are using type as image, for visual impact rather than as a way to convey a message or meaning. The meaning was the form itself. And in a way that's exactly how traditional type designers think, they think that type is the form, not the content. **Emigre:** But as a designer you have a dual function. First, you have to convey messages as clearly as you can, but secondly, you have a responsibility to do this as uniquely as you can and to impart a specific character, because this is what the client demands. This encourages designers to try out new directions, new solutions, sometimes to the disadvantage of legibility. That's the price we have to pay for progress. **Karrie:** I believe that if the content is good, you can trust it enough for a good designer to manipulate. My problem is with magazines that are purely design, when that's all there is. That is kind of shallow. And there is a lot of design out there now that has no content, but I do have to say that you can't always blame design for lack of content. The Walker Art Center pub-

lished a book, a catalog to the exhibition *Graphic Design in America*, and in it is an article by Joseph Gowanmini and he was almost blaming design for the lack of content. It's not the fault of the designer that there is no content. It's someone else's fault.

Emigre: Have you ever felt that after visiting the type designers' conference you started "noodling" type and that from that point on you lost all objectivity? **Karrie:** I never meant to be objective! **Emigre:** That's true, but what I mean is that you are now looking at type as an informed person and not as a layman. From this point on, type will always stand in your way when you read something, no matter how "neutral" the typefaces or layouts are. **Karrie:** That's probably true, although I'm certainly not looking at it as hard as I did at the time that I was writing that article. I was looking at type so hard then that I couldn't read. I'd pick up a book and see nothing but serifs and x-heights. But that's true with everything. I did an article about logos, and for a while I had to look at every building and billboard and every single manhole cover thinking, "Oh, isn't that interesting?" **Emigre:** Since you are involving yourself so much in analyzing design and type, have you ever had the urge to involve yourself in the layout of your articles? **Karrie:** I try to stay out of it. There are times when I suggest art work for my columns in *Metro*. Usually, I give them a list of photographs that I feel are appropriate. But in general, I stay out of doing any design. Sometimes the art director will ask me if I like something, and usually he'll completely disregard whatever it is I say. There are things I like and things I don't like, and every so often I will mention them to someone, but rarely during the layout process, because it is a stressful enough time as it is.

Wednesday, April 26, 1990, 12:30 PM, Los Angeles

BARRY DECK: Hello?

Emigre: Barry, it's Rudy

B: Hi.

E: How are you doing?

B: Well, I'm about to run out. I have ten more minutes here and then I have to go and I am sort of in a meeting.

E: I can call back. What would be a good time?

B: Let's say later this afternoon, at three?

E: Fine, I'll call you back at three. Bye

B: Bye

Wednesday, April 26, 1990, 3:15 PM, Los Angeles

Barry Deck: Hello?

Emigre: Hi Barry, it's Rudy

B: I was about to call you. We need to get going if we're going to do this today.

E: Are you on your way out again?

B: No, I'm fine for the next half hour or so.

E: You're a busy man?

B: I guess so.

E: What are you working on?

B: I'm finishing up several pieces for U.S. West Communications. That's the local telephone company for every state west of Wisconsin with the exception of California.

E: That's a big account!

B: I guess so.

E: Is that a new company?

B: No, I believe they were established when deregulation forced Bell Telephone to split up, one of the Bell babies.

E: Are you working on the all by yourself?

B: I have been. I just came back from the printer with the last of the samples.

E: Did you get a chance to use your own typefaces in it?

B: No, it's all set in Garamond

E: Why?

B: Oh, this project called for a very refined classical approach, and I haven't worked out my classic font yet.

E: Are you working on one?

B: It's conceptualized but undrawn

E: I looked at your typefaces and wanted to make some comments

B: Okay.

E: Well, first of all I like your typefaces, but I'm not certain why I like them, so I was hoping you'd be able to give me the answer. Even though at closer inspection it is obvious that you are trying to air these typefaces a little bit, to me they aren't joined enough. I think most of the faces have interesting details added to what were maybe traditional: click, click.

B: Oh I have a call on the other line.

E: No, don't answer it, don't let them interrupt, I'm taping you. As I was saying, I think most of the faces have interesting details added to what were maybe traditional models, but the diversions are not big enough. When I first saw them, they looked to me like badly drawn versions of existing typefaces.

B: Which ones are you talking about?

E: Right now I'm looking at Barry Sans Serif. But they all suffer from the same problem, except maybe Camospire Script and Temple Gothic. Although Temple Gothic, no, makes this fine one between a badly drawn typeface and click, click.

B: I have to take this call.

E: That call waiting is a terrible invention

B: I'll be right back ... I

I ... I'm sorry.

E: Go away with it

B: I don't have a receptionist right now, so whoever calls me has to deal with that.

Barry Sans Serif

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Industry Sans Serif

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

E: Oh. Anyway, in the case in Template Gothic, it is obvious what you want to accomplish. You have these random tricks and things. It clearly looks like it's been eaten away by bad reproduction. But that effect is lost in the lower case and the result looks like poor craftsmanship.

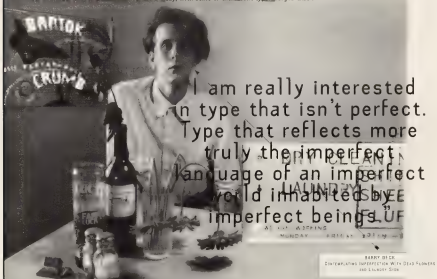
B: There are a few things that I tried to accomplish in that particular face. First there is the template reference, which comes partially out of Ed Fella's work, which I'm very much influenced by. It's also an homage to the vernacular. More specifically, there was a sign in the laundromat where I do my laundry. The sign was done with lettering templates and it was exquisite. It had obviously been done by someone who was totally naive. A few months ago, it was replaced with a plastic sign painted by a skilled sign painter. This sign, too, was painted in a naive style, but in another kind of vernacular, the kind that we are more accustomed to seeing these days, so we're not able to fetishize it as easily. I asked them if I could have the old sign, and they gladly handed it over to me. Now it's on the wall in my bedroom.

E: I guess all typeface designers use existing models to style their designs after. Some use old cuts of Garamond and others use laundry signs.

B: I was trying to make it look somewhat as if it had been drawn with a lettering template, but then I also wanted it to look as if it had suffered the distortive ravages of photomechanical reproduction.

E: Why would you want to do that?

B: Well, it seems to me that throughout the history of type, type designers have always strived to make their type look as if it were made today, with some of the current type designs that I



have noticed, things have been getting more and more perfect. I am really interested in type that isn't perfect. Type that reflects more truly the imperfect language of an imperfect world inhabited by imperfect beings.

E: But traditional typeface designers are imperfect beings, too, and I'm not sure if drawing perfect typefaces was their one and only goal. First and foremost they spend their lifetimes drawing typefaces that they enjoy creating. But they do it with a great deal of respect for well-crafted type and they keep in mind that they're doing this as part of a long tradition of people's reading habits, to which they feel a responsibility to conform.

B. In a way I am evolving towards that, too. For instance, my first face, Barry Sans Serif, was drawn in one night and it's been changed very little since, although it's not entirely finished. It was the first in a series that reflects my striving to create a typeface that combines all of the aspects of type design that I personally fetishize. I sat down and drew Barry Sans Serif right out of my head without really having a clear idea of what I was going to get and without doing any kind of preliminary sketching. It came out as a series of shapes, admittedly taken from other typefaces, a combination of all the things I like about traditional faces. And imposed on that, due to the speed at which it was done, is this kind of rough hand-drawn, almost cartoonish quality, which I appreciate and want to maintain. As a continuation of this exploration, I moved on and designed Industry Sans Serif. And Industry, in a more traditional and more disciplined way, although it isn't finished either, is starting to combine the things I like about type without the roughness of my first attempts.

E. Why do you design type in the first place?

B. I think I started doing it because I could. I remember a couple of years ago, while at CalArts, I heard about Fontographer, I really wanted to get my hands on it. It took me another year to actually get it, because CalArts didn't buy it until then. But the day they bought it, I installed it, sat down and played all night. That's how eager I was to do this. I think at the beginning, it came out of a desire for Postscript fonts that didn't exist on the Mac. While at this point there is a lot available, and I am aware of all the Postscript fonts from Monotype, The Font Company, etc., I continue doing it, now, to satisfy my own needs. I need a steady diet of fonts that are weird enough for me to really enjoy using.

E. Have you used them?

B. Yes, I do a semi-annual magazine for the Los Angeles Printmaking Society, in which I always use my own fonts. In addition to that, I do all the advertising and collateral materials for a small recording studio in Chicago. For the past two years, I haven't used anything but my own fonts on their print work.

E. And what are the reactions concerning their use of those fonts? Click...

(This is when my tape ran out. This was I'm quack!)

Click... was predominantly composed of lengthy descriptions of his rather extensive life. It was also revealed in this biography that he "did it" with a dog a couple of times. That became the inspiration for Caricopolis Script. Although it was designed as an homage to Eric Gill, I also wanted to make a little joke about him, because he basically tried to reduce everything that moved. So now there is a version of Gill Sans Serif where the letters can't seem to stop touching each other. If you look even closer, there are references to puppy dog tails protruding from above the e's, for instance.

E. Will a background story like this add anything to the design of the typeface or at least to our appreciation of it? And if it does, what happens if we are not informed correctly?

B. When a narrative is initially imposed on the design of the typeface, it can easily drop off later, but that doesn't lessen the usefulness of that narrative. It becomes a click click. When this kind of narrative is used, it is purely the impetus for the derivation of a new form. I'll be right back — I'm

I... I'm sorry. Maybe I should get a receptorist.

E. I had a question on the tip of my tongue but I forgot.

B. Something about the narrative dropping off?

E. No, that was going to be a bit too intellectual for me. What about that out?

B. You're going to get that out?

E. No, I don't add anything out that I assume is important to you. It's just that I can only work with typefaces on a utilitarian level. It is interesting to know the narrative behind the design of a typeface. It was quite a revelation to hear those things about Eric Gill and I certainly will never look at his typefaces in the same way again. But nonetheless, it's not something that influences my way of using them. I've always liked Gill type typefaces very much, and I don't think that this new knowledge will alter my ideas about their usage.

B. But don't you think that if the criteria by which you are going to judge typefaces are completely utilitarian, then there is really no reason to go beyond Univers, which has proved to function perfectly?

Caricopolis Script

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Template Gothic

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

"I need a steady diet of fonts that are weird enough for me to really enjoy using."

E. That's a difficult question to answer, because first of all, *Univers* is a great typeface and you can make it go a long way. If all we need to do as graphic designers is solve problems and organize information, then, theoretically, we shouldn't need more than one typeface, preferably one that everybody is familiar with. *Univers* can easily fulfill that demand. The problem is that eventually you'll just get bored with it. You can only do so much with it, and as a graphic designer, though you have to convey messages clearly, there is always the need for originality, which is human nature. But as interesting and funny as those narratives behind your typefaces are

B. ... They're funny and useful. I never would have considered doing *Canicopolis Script* if I hadn't considered that story about Gill.

E. But is a funny story enough for making a good typeface?

B. I think it is a little more relevant than that. It was more than just a funny story. It involved a very well-known type designer. Even though I have a lot of respect for what Gill did, I wanted to make fun of Gill in his own language, which is typography. And in the end, when I finished, there was this great bonus, a nifty typeface. And it can be read, as long as it isn't set in huge blocks of text.

E. Actually, if you set it in huge blocks of text I think you would still be able to read it. It all depends on how badly you want to read the writing. I don't think people approach reading matter thinking "Okay, how badly do I want to decipher and read this typeface?"

B. It is not impossible to read ... click, click ... oh god, this is really bothering me. I'll be right back...

E. ... but that doesn't mean you would want to set a paragraph in *Babyteeth*, although theoretically you could read that, too. Admittedly though, I did send you a paragraph of text set in *Canicopolis*. But I don't consider that its optimal use. I see it as a display or logo face. As a matter of fact, when I was at CalArts I did a redesign of an Alpo Dog Food can. It was *Alpo Pure Beef Dinner* and I set it all in *Canicopolis*.

E. I am kind of at a loss of questions. You're both very serious and cynical about your typefaces. I can't tell whether you care about these typefaces or not.

B. I grew up watching television. I'm very cynical.

E. In which respect do you care?

B. I really enjoy doing it and I'll continue doing it. And the remark you made earlier about Template Gothic being badly drawn, is really arbitrary. We'd have to print the postscrip outline and project it on the wall and you'd have to point at the specific parts of it and tell me exactly what you mean. I was doing this typeface with the intention of making it look inconsistent and fuzzy. Some letters look darker than others.

E. I am not saying that you have to change these typefaces for me. It's just that when I look at a typeface I want to see a certain intent. With *Canicopolis* for instance, some of the characters connect and some don't. I can't tell whether you didn't want to spend more time on them, or whether that is really the way you wanted to design them.

B. I wanted to keep it as close to the original Gill as possible. And in some cases it was easy to connect the letters and make it work perfectly as a script face and in some ways it was not. If I were to have made it into a script face completely, it wouldn't have looked like Gill anymore. So there is some disconnect and there's some inconsistency because of that. The letters sometimes connect and sometimes they don't ... click, click

... Sorry.

E. There are traditional type designers who are very suspicious and skeptical about everybody being able to design and use type. They foresee it will result in a general degradation of standards.

B. Well, there's only one alphabet and I don't know how many different ways there are of designing it, but I just try to design alphabets that I'd like to use. I am doing it for me. I am not doing it for traditional type designers. We'll see what it turns into. I'm only twenty-seven years old.

LAUNDRY SIGN
THIS BELIC PROBABLY APPEARED SOMEWHERE
DURING THE SHOT IS AT THE ELEVATOR
LANDSCAPE ON 34th STREET IN LOS ANGELES
ARTIST DRAWING



Enigre: You guys are quite young, aren't you? I imagined you to be much older. *Ellen:* We're almost as old as you are. *Enigre:* You do a lot of writing about graphic design. Do you have any graphic design background? *Ellen:* Yes, we're both designers! *Enigre:* Where did you go to school? *Abbott:* We both attended Cooper Union. Ellen started working for the Herb Lubalin Study Center right after graduation, and I worked with Richard



Saul Wurman before starting *Design writing research*, our studio. *Enigre:* How did you get involved in writing? *Abbott:* We were always interested in it. When we were in school we realized that there was very little critical writing on graphic design. *Enigre:* So you just started writing essays and sent them to the various design journals? *Ellen:* I met people

through my job at Cooper Union, where I did a lot of writing. *Abbott:* As students, we were influenced by people outside of graphic design, particularly the artist Hans Haacke. Now we're both in the graduate program in Art History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. We're focusing on the history and theory of design. Some people are receptive to it, and it meshes fairly well with art history in the modern period. *Enigre:* Do you make a living by writing about graphic design? *Ellen:* No, it's not that lucrative. I still work full-time at Cooper Union. *Abbott:* I do design and writing through our studio, but combining these two interests in one project is an exception to the rule. Commercial magazines pay decent journalist rates, but in general, writing about graphic design doesn't pay very well. We do it because it gives us pleasure, and because it's important to articulate ideas through writing, not just design. Ideally, we write and design at the same time—we see the two disciplines as totally related. Yet this is hardly ever possible when you publish in academic journals or commercial graphic design magazines. *Ellen:* I write and design most of the publications at the Herb Lubalin Study Center. It's wonderful to be able to write and design something. It's so empowering. I wish that art schools would encourage students to think of themselves not just as a service industry for people who know how to write. There is a great division between the humanities, writing, history, and the actual practice of graphic design. *Enigre:* You teach as well? *Abbott:* We both teach the history of design to design students. Ellen teaches at Cooper and I teach at Parson's. We're both interested in semiotics but not in the way that it usually appears in design text books. Semiotics is often used as a description of techniques, but we see it as a critical tool, in the tradition of Roland Barthes. We use semiotics in our history classes as a way to get students to look at how designers use signs. We don't want to just give them the lineage, and say: "These are the 'great men' and these are the pictures they made." *Enigre:* How do you see yourselves in the future? Will you eventually be writing the book on graphic design history? *Abbott:* We're always working on something. Yes, maybe a history. *Ellen:* Besides design history, we are particularly interested in design theory. This is something that no one wants to publish. We're very fascinated by post-structuralism. Derrida, a French philosopher who has had great impact on literary studies in the last fifteen or twenty years, has devoted a large part of his work to the nature of writing. We're interested in how to make his work speak for graphic design. His ideas suggest a way of redefining the graphic design as a writing activity, not just an after-the-fact activity of polishing and presenting. His definition of writing includes more than just the phonetic alphabet, the representation of speech. Structuralism, post-structuralism, and semiotics are areas that we would like to write about, yet it's something most graphic design publications do not want to hear about. *Abbott:*

We always try to slip it in when no one is paying attention. *Ellen:* I put it in every article I write, but it often gets edited out or watered down. *Enigre:* In general, does your work get edited much? *Ellen:* It gets edited because sometimes what we write is too complicated or too esoteric for a "general" audience. *Abbott:* It's the same with typefaces. There is a core alphabet that you have to stay close to or aspire to in order to keep things "legible." Writers deal with this, too. There is a conception of the "average reader" that editors construct and most graphic design publications have a fairly conservative picture of who their average reader is. We want to say things that fall outside of that. And some of the ideas that we like to work out in writing are also not ideas that we want to present in a very academic and formal way. We like to have more control over the presentation of our writing. However, most publications have their own agenda as far as design, which sometimes waters down our intentions.

TYPE WRITING

Structuralism and Typography

Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller

Structuralism emerged from the teachings of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure at the turn of the twentieth century. Saussure's theory of the linguistic sign infused many later currents of thought, including the anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the social mythology of Roland Barthes, and the "deconstructivist" philosophy of Jacques Derrida. These writers have looked at human phenomena—from soap bubbles to the subconscious—in terms of systematic opposition, patterns or structures of difference generating what is commonly called "meaning." This essay looks at typography in relation to structuralist ideas. What sort of sign system is typography? What are its structural features? How might structuralism inform an interpretation of typographic history, or describe a typographic aesthetic?



between the signifier and the signified: the material sound "horse" does not realistically portray the concept "domesticated quadruped." No natural relationship appears to bind them together, but only a social agreement, a cultural convention.



the conceptual realm of the signified is equally unformed, consisting of a vague nebula of perceptions and emotions rather than distinct, definable concepts. Language links these two layers together and cuts them up into discrete, repeatable segments, or signs. Saussure was radical for insisting that "ideas" do not precede language, but emerge only when the formless mass of potential thought is sliced into distinct units, linked to material signifiers.



natural relationship between the sound "horse" and the concept it invokes, why is the link between them so dependable, so persistent? To explain this link, Saussure introduced the principle of linguistic value: the identity of a sign rests not in the sign itself, but solely in its relation to other signs. The sound "horse" is recognizable only in opposition to other sounds in the language: horse is distinct from morse, force, bourse, house, hose, hearse, etc. At the same time, the concept "horse" has identity only in opposition to other concepts, such as cow, antelope, and pony. Thus we find that the "meaning" of a sign is not fixed in the substance of the sign itself, but is generated by the surrounding system. "Meaning" is a slippery signal shuttling between signs.

The sign "horse" links a material, phonic sound-image (signifier) with a mental concept (signified). For Saussure, the most troublesome feature of the linguistic sign was its arbitrariness. There is no resemblance

According to Saussure, both thought and sound exist as shapeless, formless masses before the acquisition of language.

The material realm of the signifier is an infinitely modulated continuum of sounds;

If the connection between signifier and signified is essentially arbitrary, what, then, binds the two together? If there is no iconic,

THE CRYSTAL GOBLET

"You have two goblets before you.
One is of solid gold—brought in at
great expense perhaps. The other is of
crystal—clear as air, thin as a bubble,
and as transparent. . . . Just one of
these goblets . . . will choose the crystal,
here, as everything else is
deducted to reveal rather than
to hide the beautiful thing
which it was made
to contain.
The others
all are
goblets
and give
also have a purpose in typography."

Beatrice Ward, *The Crystal Goblet*, 1903



Writing is thus a *meta-language*: that is, a language "about" another language, a set of signs for representing signs. Typography, then, is a *meta-meta-language*, a medium whose signified is not word- themselves but rather the alphabet. Ideally, this meta-meta-language would transparently reveal its signified like the gleaming bowl of a crystal goblet.

What sort of semiotic system is typography? What are its signifiers, and what are its signifieds? Typography is one aspect of the broader practice of *writing*, which Saussure described as a sign system separate from speech itself. He saw speech as the original, natural medium of language; he defined writing as a system of signs (for example, the alphabet) which *represents* speech.

Is it possible for typography to ever fulfill Beatrice Ward's famous imperative to passively contain a pre-existing "content" or signified? Saussure was dismayed to find that the alphabet itself is a scratched and murky

container for the spoken language, which fails to passively reveal its object. Westerners revere the alphabet as the most rational and transparent of all writing systems, the clearest of crystal goblets for containing the words of speech—unlike ideograms or hieroglyphs, it is economical, easily mastered, and relatively consistent. The alphabet is also considered abstract, historically cleansed of its origins in pictographic symbols.

"Alphabet is one of the functions into which the
(the human) power is put. . . . Though
from obscure collective action, the
one given grating gives nearly a
legendary document to a clear sign
barren. Part of the hand can really
passed into the glass, around these
goblets. . . . To the mark, and your
charge is but a penny to the
gentle man, and so on to the
full glass—the Cape Mare
measure which you, too
gold down for a shilling."
Melville, *Moby-Dick* 1851

This alphabetic goblet is, however, clouded with imperfections. Take, for example, the word "horse" and the series of other English words whose sound it can be contrasted against: *morse*, *force*, *bourse*, *house*, *hose*, *hearse*, etc. If one were to examine the spoken, verbal sign in isolation from writing, one would find simple phonetic differences.

But there is no apparent logic to how the alphabet represents these sounds in writing: a single syllable in speech is variously written *-orse*, *-orce*, and *-ourse*.

Harold Oppenheim
Cups, saucers,
and spoons in
1916



The opacity and inconsistency of writing infuriated Saussure, who felt that the alphabet had violated the innocence of the original, natural, spoken language with a monstrous, unnatural perversion; writing

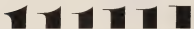
had diverted the organic evolution of speech and had contaminated its crystal purity. Saussure celebrated the primary role of the signifier in *verbal* language, but he could not tolerate the same problematic in *writing*. The post-structuralist philosophy of Jacques Derrida confronts this contradiction in Saussure's theory. Derrida points out that although Saussure was outraged by the alphabet's refusal to patiently reflect its spoken referent, Saussure had discovered that in writing, as in language, the realm of the signifier generates meaning apart from a pre-existing signified.



of the sixteenth century distanced the letter from calligraphy by constructing roman alphabets with the tools of geometry. The letterform was no longer thought of as a sequence of manual pen strokes, but as a conceptual ideal bound to no particular technology. This Platonic structure became typography's new signified.



orthogonal grid over the organic forms of traditional lettering. Italic forms were generated by a shift in the grid: here was a procedure divorced from calligraphy and prophetic of the mechanical distortions enabled by nineteenth- and twentieth-century technologies. For the King's committee, the grid was as an objective filter through which to glimpse the ideal alphabet, figured as clearly as the image cast on the gridded glass of a *camera obscura*.



into extremes of thick and thin and reduced serifs to wafer-thin slabs. There is a difference, however, between the idealism of the "modern" faces and the idealism of the older rational diagrams. Renaissance theorists, joining contemporary architects' search for canonical standards, hoped to discover absolute proportions governing the alphabet. The *Roman du Roi* also sought an absolute norm, a rational design standard, although it embraced the spirit of science and bureaucracy rather than humanistic research.



Bodoni and Didot signalled an idealization of a different sort: in place of a Platonic norm, these fonts reconceived the alphabet as an arbitrary system of elements whose existence

hinges on its material representation. In Saussure's terms, the *signified* was now seen to depend on the *signifier*. The fonts of Bodoni and Didot reduced the alphabet to a system of polar oppositions—thick and thin, vertical and horizontal, serif and stem. Typographic form was no longer compelled to passively reflect an ideal, pre-existing "alphabet"; instead, the alphabet was seen as a collection of linguistic elements open to manipulation.



The radical classicism of modern typography, like the neo-classicism in architecture of the same period, replaced *idealism* with *relativism*. Classical

architecture had been revered since the Renaissance as an absolute standard authorized by a divine past. Enlightenment archeology, however, revealed antiquity to be an inconsistent culture rather than a monolithic edifice. "Antiquity" lost its status as the pristine origin of civilization, becoming one culture among many. Likewise, the classical "language" of form became one style among many, employed for its rhetorical value.

¹ Frank Dorman, *The Shaping of Our Alphabet* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1915).

The radical decisions of Bodoni and Didot opened the way for inventive manipulations of the alphabet's linguistic elements by designers of advertising display faces during the nineteenth century.



Beginning in the early nineteenth century,

Fat Face faces exaggerated Bodoni's polarization of letterforms into thick and thin elements.



Severe condensing was another popular form of manipulation.

The effect is particularly startling in the letter A in this sample from an 1876 word type catalogue.

The wholly vertical stress of Bodoni replaced the oblique stress of old-style faces, which were installed as calligraphy.



This Roman Grotesque, published in 1836, adds a second and more striking twist to the geometric regularity of modern faces.

The Italian style is another personal exploration of linguistic possibility,



turning serifs inside out and rotating the thick strokes from a vertical to a horizontal position.

The sans serif display faces of the nineteenth century can also be seen as a linguistic manipulation, in which the serif ends and the contrast with have been reduced to zero. This face was published in 1834.



Egyptian or Antique faces shift the linguistic function of

the serif from a passive, ornamental ending to an active, load-bearing structure.



Rob Roy Kelly has classified a huge variety of nineteenth-century ornamental



faces, showing there to be variants of a few basic styles. Here he charts some of the forms derived from the Egyptian or "slab" serif.

In the 1960s the computer scientist Donald Knuth turned structural typography into a computer language.



For Knuth, a "metal font" is a font about faces, a description of typographic family traits: relations of thick to thin, height to width, serif to stem, etc.

The computer program Metafont defines letterkerns in terms of such traits, each of which is subject to geometric manipulation.

Technologies consolidated in the 1830s allowed variations on a single design to be manufactured inexpensively. Ornamental details were added to existing designs and printed according to their similarity.



he break initiated by Didot and Bodoni continued into the nineteenth century, opening the way for a proliferation of display faces which rejected any notion of a classical norm in favor of an incessant pursuit of *novelty*. The inventiveness of this period may

be understood, in part, as an effect of technology. The introduction of the combined pantograph and router in 1834 revolutionized wood-type manufacture, allowing different sizes of a font to be generated mechanically from a single drawing. This automatic and geometric approach to the scale of letterforms led the historian Daniel Berkeley Updike to judge the pantograph as a mixed blessing: "At first sight it would appear... a wholly admirable invention; and it would be, if it did not tend to mechanize the design of types."

The programmatic shifts in scale allowed by the pantograph encouraged an understanding of the alphabet as a flexible system, susceptible to systematic variations divorced from a properly calligraphic origin. The sudden variety of "conceptual" typefaces—condensed, extended, inline, outline, shadowed, extruded, faceted, floriated, perspectival, bowed—evidences a shift in the signified of typography. The notion of letterforms as essential, archetypal structures gave way to a recognition of letters as units within a larger system of formal features (weight, stress, cross-bars, serifs, angles, curves, ascenders, descenders, etc.). The relationships between letters within a font became more important than the identity of individual letterforms. The experimentation of nineteenth-century display faces suggested that the "alphabet" consists of a flexible system of differences, not a collection of fixed symbols.

The moralizing conservatism of the Fine Press Movement, the advent of machine composition, and the increased use of lithography worked together at the end of the nineteenth century to discourage eccentricity in favor of establishing typographic standards and adapting traditional faces to the new technology. The experimentation of the nineteenth century was categorized by typographic historians as a vulgar interlude, an analogue to the hucksterism of rapidly industrializing cities. The conservatism which accompanied the shift into machine composition has served as a model for the subsequent technological shifts into photo and digital typesetting.

In each stage, the typographic forms of a preceding technology have served as a standard against which the newer technology has been judged. In each stage there has been an attempt to maintain the "integrity" of letterforms *independent of their means of production*. Thus an ideal of *simulation* has dominated type design, which requires the newer technologies to mimic metal type. With key exceptions, the *signified* of these technologically diverse modes of typography has been *hand-composed type cast in metal*, with its associations of craft and tradition.

MODERNISM

The exceptions to the dominant aesthetic of a technologically untainted typeface have been those fonts which embrace the formal properties specific to a given medium or mode of construction: for example,

A B C D E F G H I J A B C D E F G

the reductive geometry of Theo van Doesburg's 1919 font and Bart van der Leek's 1911 design for *Het Plus*, which construct alphabets out of the principles of de Stijl painting;

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v

the stencil construction of Joset Albers's 1925 Bauhaus typeface, which generates an alphabetic ensemble out of a restricted repertoire of elementary shapes;

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x

the geometric armature of Herbert Bayer's 1925 font "universal," which attempted to rationalize typography by producing an alphabet out of interchangeable parts:

z y x w v u t s r q p o n m l k j i h g f e d c b a

or the even more radical reduction of Wladyslaw Strzeminski's 1931 alphabet, which generates letterforms from a framework of right angles and the arcs of a single circle.

These exceptions belong to the mode of typographic experimentation which we term "structuralist typography." This approach was inaugurated by Bodoni and Didot and was continued by the display faces of the nineteenth century; in the twentieth century, modernism invested this mode of letter design with ideological significance. Structuralist typography implicitly challenges the concept of an essential, idealized, core letterform. By shifting the emphasis from the *individual character* to the *ensemble* of the alphabet, structuralist typography exchanges the fixed identity of the letter for the relational system of the font.

The typefaces of the avant-gardes effect this displacement with formal parameters that suppress the individuality of letters by forcing attention to the system—the figures in Strzeminski's font, for example, are indecipherable apart from the overall code. These fonts are a typographic analogue for structuralist philosophy and linguistics, which seeks to find, as Derrida has written, "a form or function organized according to an internal legality in which elements have meaning only in the solidarity of their correlation or their opposition."

The modernism of de Stijl, Dada, Futurism, Constructivism, and the Bauhaus aimed to effect a "defamiliarization" of the world. Defamiliarization, as theorized by the Russian formalist critic Victor Shklovsky in the 1910s, held that the everyday world is invisible until we are forced to see it differently, and that art is a primary means for "making strange" the already-seen and already-known. Cinematic shock techniques, the "New Vision" of photography, and typographic experimentation were facets of the modernist attack on the familiar.

The modernist ambition of defamiliarization is an impetus behind some recent fonts which work within the mode we have called structuralist typography, including many of the faces featured in *Emigre*: for example,

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJ AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHh

the additive, bitmapped faces of Zuzana Licko, such as *Emperor*, 1987, which endorses the limits of low-resolution output, and Jeffery Kessler's 1989 homage to modernism, *Neoflex*:

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

the reduced template of angles which generates Max Krieger's 1988 *Zenitext*, down to the minimal vocabulary of geometric elements employed in Albers's 1925 *structured letters*:

Aabbccddeeffgghhijjkkllmmnnoppqrrsst

or the emphatic constructedness of Licko's 1988 *Variety* family, which shares the fascination with system and geometry that characterizes Bayer's 1925 typeface universal.

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPp

These neo-avant-garde fonts do not, however, take the structuralist principle to the extremes approached by the historical avant-gardes. Licko's 1989 *Lunatic*, for example, conserves the conventional relationships of the alphabet, while in contrast, Strzemiński's elliptical font expresses a vast range of functional roles with a minimal set of elements.

Like the fonts of the avant-gardes, many of these neo-modern typefaces look to technology for aesthetic cues, rather than imitating traditional typography. In the 1920s Bayer saw industry as the potential foundation for a universal and democratic society. A similar technological optimism appears to inform many neo-modern typefaces; these are produced, however, in a changed, post-industrial world in which technology can no longer be seen as a benign source of liberation.

The commercial exuberance of nineteenth-century typography is distinct from the avant-garde experimentation of the twentieth century. With modernism there is the entry into the typographic arena of a self-consciously ideological project: the solicitous *novelty* of advertising display faces is replaced by the aggressive *defamiliarization* of the avant-garde, which has historically positioned itself in opposition to mass culture and the "bourgeoisie." Echoing the stance of the avant-gardes, neo-modernism implicitly defines itself against the pop mainstream,

AECFAFAGIRASS ABCDEFGHIJKL

which includes such "novel" fonts as Lubalin Graph and Milton Glaser's *Baby Teeth*. While the typefaces of the neo-avant-garde currently project a mystique of removal from mainstream culture, they are being absorbed rapidly into the graphics of advertising, mass-circulation magazines, and department stores.

Post-structuralist theory in criticism and philosophy builds upon and revises Saussure's ideas by questioning the generation of "meaning" by the speaking—rather than writing—subject. Saussure had ranked writing as inferior to the spoken word, a "crystal goblet" for conveying speech; therefore, post-structuralism is seen as another instance of Western philosophy's characterization of writing as a faulty reflection of speech, an artificial by-product of the otherwise natural workings of the mind. In response, Derrida has foregrounded the typographic and rhetorical force of *writing*. Post-structuralism has provoked suspicion of coherent "master codes" such as Marxism, which grounds meaning in a single totalizing structure. This de-stabilizing (de-structuring, deconstructing) move corresponds to a philosophical shift which has been termed *post-structuralism*.

In typography there is also an apparent shift between the approach we have described as structuralist and fonts such as Jeffery Keedy's 1990 Manuscript, and Barry Deck's 1990 Caniculus Script and Template Gothic. While these faces participate in the structuralist devaluation of the archetypal *letter* in favor of the alphabetic *system*, they modify that tradition by setting up systems which are not consistent or univocal, which fail to be master codes to which all letters refer.

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
abcdefghijklm

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
abcdefghijklm

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
abcdefghijklm

These fonts which we call post-structuralist are involved with issues of representation: Deck's Template Gothic implies an inexact, degraded form of mechanical reproduction, while Keedy's Manuscript recalls elementary school exercises—"reproduction" is shown to result not only from external technologies but from the disciplinary socialization of the individual. These post-structuralist fonts have a figurative, narrative character that is distinct from the formal distraction of structuralist typography. They suggest a typographic practice that participates in the broader cultural reevaluation of modernism: while the avant-garde and its aftermath in the neo-avant-garde has institutionalized the "shock of the new," post-modernism has replaced this faith in renewal with parody, quotation, pastiche, and an uneasy alliance with technology.

Etter taptidens overgang, danner sig selv og oppfører

Emigre: Do you read? Johnny: *Does Johnny read?* **What? Does I read?** You bet. Don't ever ask me such a question again. Come on, what do you think I am, **Illiterate?** Emigre: What do you like to read? Johnny: Well, my favorite right now is **THE NATIONAL**. Man, is it ever great. A stroke of genius. I gotta hand it to that Frank DeFord. Theyotta make him President. **What more could you want? Sports coverage front to back, page to page.** I gotta 10-year subscription so I'll never miss an issue. Oh yeah, I also read **TV Guide**. It's the greatest. I love the little black TV boxes with white "s" in them. And lately I've been enjoying **KICKBOXER MAGAZINE**. Emigre: What don't you like to read? Johnny: What don't I like to read? Encyclopedias. National Geographic. **Cosmo**. **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**. Annual reports. Shakespeare. Lots of stuff like that. Get it outta here. Emigre: Are you ever bothered by the way that information is presented to you? For instance, have you ever taken the wrong exit because the damn sign was too small, etc.? Johnny: Ya. Certain things bother me. Sometimes the type is too small, too big, too fancy. All these different sizes fighting with the page. Gimme some photos. Mike Tyson's head getting slammed like a grapefruit on the sidewalk. Fullbleed centerspread shots with just a caption in a normal type style design font. I like that Halvetica stuff. Or FRANKlingothic. Any of those Gothics is OK by me. Just make it readable. Hit me in the fuckin head with it. Emigre: Do you ever notice any signs? Johnny: Sure. I notice certain signs. **STOP. YIELD.** Freeway signs are some of my favorites. White type. Bold. Green background. Nice border. What more do you want. **They're great.** Emigre: The insert that Mr. Valicenti produced for *Step-By-Step* (Volume 6, number 2, 1990)... can the guy on the street really read that stuff? Mr. Valicenti claims that these type treatments, this type that really "talks," is an effort to "resurrect the pleasures of reading." How much fun can it be for a guy like yourself having to decipher something so complex? Johnny: Ya. I saw that piece. My nephew's a graphic designer and gets all these publications. He goes to that college called **CRANBROOK**. Jesus, the stuff I see from that place is like a bad dream. All these layers going on and you don't know who's in the dream or what country you're in or who's a Martian or what's saying what. That thing VALICENTI did was "meant to resurrect the pleasures of reading," but I don't know. **PLEASURES!** That cab driver was some wild Iranian roadmap. Arrows going everywhichaway. Do you think VALICENTI could use a few arrows or something? JESUS. And that **BLIND DATE** page. **What the hell is that?** Looks like a Berthold wedding invitation on acid. Now that **BEAUTY SALON** page. Now we're talking. That's my turf. The **ENQUIRER**. Another of my favorite reading materials. Very fine. Very fine. And that final page he did looks like the funny pages. I love the comics. I felt right at home. Emigre: Do you experience any of the subtleties of type that are necessary to enjoy that insert to the fullest? Johnny: **Subtleties?** Ya I saw some things. The one lady had blue hair. And the hands on that page were just sitting there. Just cut off. Good pictures. Good color. Good cropping, Valicenti. Emigre: Maybe you would much rather sit at home and read the daily sports section of the Chicago Tribune, and for all you care every piece of printed matter should look like that... am I right? Johnny: Sure. I like to sit at home and read the **SPORTS**. **SO WHAT! SO WHAT!** It's concise, powerful, gripping, meaningful, easy to read. But come on... I like variety. Afterall, **TV GUIDE** looks alot different and I love it. What? You think I want my Sports Daily's to read like the **GUIDE**? Or the **ENQUIRER**? Gimme a break. Don't kid yourself. Just make it readable. Stop all this confusion in type treatments.



BLACK BOX: 1991 AND 1992 MAGAZINES: Shows type treatments from Emigre magazine.

2 student types:

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V W X Y Z
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a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o
p q r s t u v w x y z

((?! #%^ -./+=))

Philippa Adams (Boston University)

Mattefont.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u v w x y z
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Hand-drawn designs.

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m a l h a b i l e
e r
e p e l
t h e
l o n
i a n c e
g e o u n
o m m a h

A happy accident while testing the spacing.

A A B A C C D D E E F F G G H H I
J J K K L L M M N N O O P P Q Q R R
S S T T U U V V W W X X Y Y Z Z

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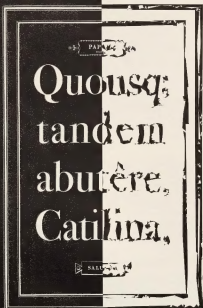
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